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# OPEN LETTERS.

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## THE ROCHESTER CODE.

IN the course of his article on nomenclatorial principles, published in the March issue of the BOTANICAL GAZETTE, Mr. M. L. Fernald discusses at some length Professor Underwood's recent treatment of the fern genera in this country, making the following statement in that connection :

In Britton and Brown's *Illustrated Flora*, published in 1896, fifty-nine species of true ferns are recognized, and the names, we are told, are those authorized by the Rochester code. But in Professor Underwood's latest treatment more than 25 *per cent.* of those very species appear under different names—still the names authorized by the Rochester code.

Mr. Fernald then presents, in support of this statement, a comparative table of fifteen northeastern ferns, with the names used in Britton and Brown's *Flora* and those in the last edition of Underwood's *Our Native Ferns* given in parallel columns. This table, as an illustration of the remark above quoted, cannot fail to be misleading, since Mr. Fernald evidently wishes the reader to draw the conclusion that the Rochester code is an uncertain guide, and that the same author may interpret it in different ways. In order to ascertain how far such a deduction is to be considered reliable, let us analyze briefly the supposed divergences between Professor Underwood's interpretation of the code in 1896 and in 1900, the dates of the two works mentioned. I follow substantially the same order as that of the table.

1. *Onoclea Struthiopteris*, being regarded by Professor Underwood now as generically distinct from *O. sensibilis*, is separated under the first available generic name, *Matteuccia* since *Struthiopteris* had been earlier applied to *Lomaria*.

2. *Filix* replaces *Cystopteris*, and *Phyllitis* supplants *Scolopendrium* because the first mentioned names have been proven to be the older. This is in strict conformity to the requirements of the code, notwithstanding the fact that conservative botanists would not admit the change.

3. The type of *Dicksonia* being a tropical tree fern, the American herbaceous plant is very properly separated as a genus under the first available name. The various species of *Polystichum* are also segregated from *Dryopteris*, and the latter name is not abandoned, as might be inferred from Mr. Fernald's table. It certainly involves no novel or unusual interpretation of the Rochester code to divide an original aggregate into what later study may prove to be distinct elements; and in the light of numerous new species of

Antennaria of the *plantaginifolia* group that have been proposed from time to time by Mr. Fernald, it is pertinent to inquire whether he does not himself recognize the necessity for occasional segregations. Botanists of the last century, who were familiar with *A. plantaginifolia*, as they supposed, would probably be fully as dismayed over the expansion of this species as modern fern students are likely to be over the division of *Dryopteris*.

4. *Phegopteris Robertiana* and *Notholaena dealbata* are examples merely of the elevation of varieties to specific rank, an everyday practice among botanists of all shades of opinion.

5. The case of *Pellaea* is analogous to that of *Dryopteris*.

6. *Cheilanthes gracilis* being a homonym, the first available name, *C. Feei*, is taken up for the species.

Applying the process of exclusion to Mr. Fernald's table in the light of the above remarks, it will be observed that of the fifteen species which he cites, the names of only two are the result of an altered interpretation of the code. These are *Pteridium* for *Pteris aquilina* and its allies, and the restoration of *Asplenium thelypteroides* for *A. acrostichoides*. If we assume the same ratio to hold good throughout Professor Underwood's work, we shall find that all but about 4 per cent. of the changes are the legitimate outgrowth of added research, consisting of corrections of homonyms, division of aggregate genera and species, etc.; and the same changes would probably have been made by the same author under almost any system of nomenclature. On the other hand it may be considered excellent testimony to the soundness of the Rochester principles that after the application to them of Professor Underwood's method of determining generic types so small a percentage of actual changes should occur. The citation of such cases as those discussed above affords no basis whatever for adverse criticism of the code, since, as already explained, the same course might be pursued even by opponents of the Rochester nomenclature.—CHARLES LOUIS POLLARD, *U. S. National Museum*.